



NYU ups selection of digital textbooks

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by [Anna Sanders](#)

In today's increasingly technology-dependent world, students may no longer be flipping through pages of Plato's "Republic."

NYU Bookstores' pilot program to give students the option to purchase CaféScribe digital textbooks, began last fall and is picking up steam.

"We were kind of testing it out to see if it's something viable and something that we want to continue, and it definitely is," said Phil Christopher, director of NYU Bookstores.

The system allows students to buy digital textbook key codes at the Main Bookstore that gives them access to the eBook on the CaféScribe website. With CaféScribe, students can highlight and take notes on their computers in addition to searching and reading the digital book.

"They can take notes and share their notes, and what's really great is there is a social networking platform built in so students can create study groups and interact with their professors or other students directly within CaféScribe," said CaféScribe CEO Bryce Johnson.

Students who purchase a CaféScribe eBook have access to the downloaded material on their computer forever.

"Students love the mobility and flexibility of using CaféScribe from their laptop," Johnson added.

Despite these advantages, many students and professors still favor traditional print textbooks.

Director of Public Relations for the National Association of College Stores Charles Schmidt said students are more inclined to choose print material because of a professor's preference.

"Right now [professors] are most comfortable with what they know, and that's print copy," he said.

Schmidt added that, of association members that offer eBooks, digital sales only make up 2 to 3 percent of total course material sales. Furthermore, 74 percent of students still prefer print over eBooks, according to the NACS OnCampus Research Student Watch survey.

"There are some students who just prefer to have a physical book in their hands — and that is fine," Johnson said.

But NACS predicts that the number of students with long-term exposure to technology may change that.

"NACS predicts that digital course materials could make up between 10 to 15 percent of textbook sales by 2012," Schmidt said.

The predicted increase may be a result of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act by Congress in 2008. The bill encourages professors to give students more cost-saving options through used and digital material for their classes.

In an e-mail from Provost David McLaughlin, the university also told professors to post textbook lists during registration as opposed to three to four weeks before classes begin — in accordance with new HEOA requirements.

Christopher said NYU Bookstores wants to participate in the increasing sale of eBooks. In addition to CaféScribe, the bookstore plans on selling eBooks through Jumpbooks next fall.

"I think, as we go forward, that eBooks will simply become a format that more and more students are going to want, and we wanted to be able to offer that to them," Christopher said.

He added that eBooks typically cost 30 to 50 percent less than print textbooks, depending on the publisher. If more students choose eBooks over conventional print material, sales at the bookstore could suffer.

But Christopher said the bookstore's main goal is to provide options.

"If someone buys an electronic book, they're not going to typically buy the print book," he said. "But again, it's all about giving customers a choice of format."